An integrative strategy based on Reflective thinking and a Socratic method for developing EFL reflective writing skills among Formal language Secondary school students

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Abstract

The current study aimed at developing some English language reflective writing skills for second year Formal secondary school students through anintegrative strategy based on Reflective thinking and Socratic Method. The study adopted the quasi-experimental pre-posttest, experimental /control groups. Participants were second year Formal secondary school students. Two groups (35 each) were selected from Omar El farouk secondary school, Sharkya governorate, Egypt in the academic year 2019-2020. The experimental group learned through the integrative strategy for developing their reflective writing skills. On the other hand, the control group received regular instruction. Instruments were: questionnaires designed for reflective writing skills, approved by a panel of jury. Based on thereflective writing checklist, areflective writing testwasdesigned and pre-postused. By the end of the experiment, the test was post administered to both groups to conclude the effect of the integrative strategy on developing the experimental group EFLreflective writing skills. Findings of the study were statistically treated. It was found out that the experimental group achieved gains in their EFL reflective writing skills,than the control one. The results of the study were positive; the hypotheses were accepted.

Key words: integrative strategy (reflective thinking and Socratic Method) – reflective writing.

I.   Introduction

Writing is the ability to represent thoughts on paper. It helps writers express who they are as persons and move easily among facts, inferences and opinions without getting confused and without confusing their

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reader. Writing is a fundamental skill that allows people to explain the adequacy for their arguments and helps them understand how truth is provided in a given discipline.

Hilsdon (2006) pointed out that reflection is more than a set of skills; it is an expression of the natural relationship that exists between learning and language. He added that reflection is a way of enabling self-development and deeper learning by looking back at an experience so as to learn from it and then move forward. A person may discuss learning from an experience; reflective writing takes this stage further by putting the reflection into the more permanent and structured format of a written account and linking it to academic theory.

Reflective writing, unlike other writing genres, is more open ended; questioning and exploratory, raising rather than answering questions, and enabling exploration of connections between ideas encountered in the course and the writer's experience (Creme, 2005). Morrison (1996) highlighted that reflective writing encourages writers to engage in the reflective thinking process through analyzing approaches and clarifying ideas, perceptions, and attitudes. Some research has shown that students' reflective thinking can be successfully supported through the use of reflection prompts that structure student thinking (Lai &Calandra 2010).

Reflective writing, when viewed as a process and when done properly, has a unique ability to develop the interior life of the writer (Fink, 2003). The act of reflective writing compels the writer to examine, clarify, and crystallize thoughts and ideas that might otherwise be floating around the mind in disconnected fragments. Specifically, reflection helps students combine experience and knowledge together to produce new learning, apply theory to practice, encourage a critical reflection, gain insight into personal development, and manage their emotions throughout the learning process (Jones & Shelton, 2006).

According to Fink (2003), reflective writing focuses on the writer's learning experience itself and attempts to identify the significance and meaning of a given learning experience, primarily for the writer. Reflective writing allows students to integrate their thoughts and experiences with didactic material to more adequately understand both the experiences and the didactic material (McGuire et al., 2009). In their study, reflective writing was defined as an assignment that is focused on an activity that students have experienced, such as class readings or group activities, that highlights what the student learned from the activity.

According to Bolton, G. (2010), there is some tips include in reflective writing:

- Writerexplores and explains what happened.

- Writer shows how understand, why things happens and what are going to be done.

- Writerdoes not write about everything that happened, just key events or ideas.

- Writer reflects on what happened in the past and how it will have an impact on future ideas or activities.

According to Lee- Davies, (2007), there are different tools that can be used to record reflective thought.The most commonly used is Word. However, reflective thinking can be captured in different ways, from blogging through to video journals. When choosing a reflective writing tool for academic work that needs to be assessed, check course lecturer which format(s) can be allowed to use.

Furthermore, the benefits of reflective writing are noted by several studies. Tang (2002) argued that reflection and critical thinking are enhanced through writing. Craft (2005) discussed how reflective writing is useful in developing writing and reading skills and can also reduce stress levels. Reflective writing has been shown to promote reflection amongst pre-service and in-service teachers concerning the use of classroom material, interaction with students, and attitudes towards teaching (Beed et al., 2005). In addition Hiemstra (2001) listed a number of potential benefits of keeping reflective written records, such as increased ability of self-expression, self-discovery and reduced stress.

Moreover, reflective writing helps students develop confidence, competence in their writing and perceive themselves as writers (Graham, 2003). According to a study accomplished by The Learning Centre, The University of New South Wales in 2008, reflective writing is:

- the response to experiences, opinions, events or new information;

- the response to thoughts and feelings;

- a way of thinking to explore your learning;

- an opportunity to gain self-knowledge;

- a way to achieve clarity and better understanding of what is learned,

- a chance to develop and reinforce writing skills; and

- a way of making meaning out of what is studied.

II. Context of the Problem:

A pilot study was conducted by the researcher on a group of (20) EFL second year of formal language Secondary school students in Zagazig. The researcher noticed that students of the Formal Language Secondary School in Zagazig were unable to give opinions, makecomparisons, use an organizing structure, infer links of events, paraphrase another person's ideas, identify the author's tone, distinguish between literal and implied meanings and draw logical conclusions, so as to offer some insights into what the literary work might communicate. They could not make value judgments about the text. The results of Reflective Writing pilot tests indicated the following:

Table (1)

The pilot' results in the reflective writing

No.	Skills	Frequency
1	**Writing about fiction such as romance, horror and crime.**	**62%**
2	**Creating an imaginative and original composition.**	**75%**

3	**Reflecting about everyday life situations.**	**70%**
4	**Writing statements like "If I ……"**	**65%**

III.   Purposes of The study:-

The purposes of the current study were:

- Realizing the effect of an integrative strategy based- on a reflective thinking and Socratic Method on developing EFL students' reflective writing skills.

IV.   Significance of The study:

Results drawn from the current study was hopefully being beneficial to the following categories:-

1-   Instructors of English:

The study might provide them with systematic and practical procedures through a strategy based on reflective thinking and Socratic Method to be applied within the classroom on developing EFL reflective writing skills.

2-   Formal language secondary school students:

This study might improve the EFL students' reflective writing skills, besides their positive interaction and participation with the teacher within the classroom.

V.   Statement of the problem:

In the light of the aforementioned account and pilot study results the researcher experience of teaching English, the study problem could thus be stated as follows:

The second year formal language Secondary school students in Zagazig- Sharkia Governorate have difficulties in the skills of reflective writing as has been revealed through the pilot study results.

So, the current study was an attempt to investigate the effect of integrative strategy based on reflective thinking and Socratic Method on developing reflective writing skills.

The current study was an attempt to answer the following main question and the respective sub-questions following it:

"What is the effect of an integrative strategy based- on a reflective thinking and Socratic Method on developing EFL reflective writing skills of Formal language secondary school students?"

1-   What are the required reflective writing skills forthe second year Formal language secondary school students?

2-   What is the frame of an integrative strategy based- on a reflective thinking and Socratic Method to develop reflective writing skills?

3-   How can this strategy have an effect on developing EFL students' reflective writing skills?

Reflective thinkingfocuses on the process of making judgments about what has happened. However, reflective thinking is important in prompting learning during complex problem-solving situations because it provides students with an opportunity to step back and think about how they actually solve problems and how a particular set of problem solving strategies is appropriated for achieving their goal.

Reflective thinking helps learners develop higher-order thinking skills by prompting learners to a) relate new knowledge to prior understanding, b) think in both abstract and conceptual terms, c) apply specific strategies in novel tasks, and d) understand their own thinking and learning strategies.

Recording reflective thoughts can take many forms, such as photo journals, fictional stories, poetry or paintings. According to Moon, (2006), there are many types of reflective writing: Journal -Learning diary-Log book-Reflective note-Essay diary-Peer review-Self-assessment.

Alian, (2014) examined the effect of the some reflective thinking strategies based program on developing some literary reading skills and metacognitive reading awareness of the EFL student teachers. The study adopted the quasi – experimental design – one experimental group of Forty English major students at the third year Faculty of Education participated in the study. The instruments were a pre – posttest for the literary reading skills of the EFL student teachers and a scale of the metacognitive reading awareness of the EFL student teachers. An instructor's guide was designed by the researcher to teach (King Lear) through the reflective thinking strategies. Results indicated that the program had a positive effect on developing some literary reading skills and metacognitive reading awareness of the EFL student teachers.

The Socratic method of teaching is a student-centered approach that challenges learners to develop their critical thinking skills and engages in analytic discussion. The Socratic Method can be used at any grade level and with all subject areas, and lessons can be adapted to fit a changing society. The Socratic Method is a method of hypothesis elimination, in that better hypotheses are found by steadily identifying and eliminating those that lead to contradictions (Paul, R. & Elder, and L. 2006). .

The Socratic Method searches for general, commonly held truths that shape beliefs and scrutinizes them to determine their consistency with other beliefs. The basic form is a series of questions formulated as tests of logic and fact intended to help a person or group discover their beliefs about some topic, exploring definitions or logoi and seeking to characterize general characteristics shared by various particular instances.

The Procedures of Socratic Method are:-

▪   Planning significant questions (own-brain-storming-sequences that provide meaning and direction to the dialogue).

▪   Using wait time: Allow at least thirty seconds for students to respond. (Think period).

▪   Following up on students' responses (feedback).

▪   Asking probing questions.

- Letting students discover knowledge on their own through the probing questions the teacher poses.

- Write key points that summarize.

- Drawing as many students as possible into the discussion.

The stages of Socratic Method are**:-**

Wonder - hypothesis - elenchus - accepting or revising the hypothesis - acting accordingly - the participants now apply what has been learned. This may entail revising a previously held belief, reflecting on the session, wondering about something in a new way, agreeing to meet again, or changing behavior. *http://www.critical thinking.org.*

MiYoung, et al (2014) examined the impact of Socratic questioning on pre-service teachers' critical thinking skills in web-based collaborative learning. Their critical thinking skills were analyzed in two ways – a content analysis of individual postings and students' discussion flows in terms of the following three consensus building types: (1) quick consensus building; (2) integration-oriented consensus building; and (3) conflict-oriented consensus building. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses of their discussion flow were examined using a discussion flow analysis tool and a multinomial logistic regression. Results from the content analysis showed that novel, justified and critical messages were more likely to be found on the pre-service teachers' discussion boards in which the instructor provided Socratic questionings. In addition, a multinomial logistic regression analysis showed that groups exposed to the Socratic questionings were more likely to develop consensus through a conflict-oriented process, rather than a quick consensus building with simple agreements.

The Role of the teacher in Socratic Method during Socratic questioning is, the teacher is a model of critical thinking that respects students' viewpoints, probes their understanding, and shows genuine interest in their thinking. The teacher poses questions that are more meaningful than those a novice of a given topic might develop on his or her own. The teacher creates and sustains an intellectually stimulating classroom environment and acknowledges the value of the student in that environment. In an intellectually open, safe, and demanding learning environment, students are challenged, yet comfortable in answering questions honestly and fully in front of their peers.

VI.   Instruments of the study:

To achieve the main goal of the current study the researcher designed a pre- post reflective writing skills test, to measure the students' level before and after the experiment.

VII.   Delimitation

Participants of the Study:

The participants in the current study were second year secondary students in Omar El-Farouk Formal secondary school in the academic year 2019/2020. They were selected to develop their reflective writing skills. To make sure that the improvement of the participants' reflective writing in the experimental group was

attributed to the use of the integrative strategy based on Reflective thinking and Socratic Method", some variables were controlled. These variables included the participants' age, which ranged from (16), to (18) years old, and economic level; both belonged to the same economic level.

Before the experiment, it was important to make sure of the homogeneity among the two groups. So, the researcher pre-administered the reflective writing test to the two groups. Table (2) shows the findings of the statistical treatment of the data gained from pre-administering the study reflective writing test.

Table (2)

Both groups' reflective writing pre-results

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	35	10.83	1.87	.32	1.6	58	.17
Control	35	10.57	1.68	.27	1.6	54.06	.17

Table (2) shows that there was no significant difference between the mean both groups inreflective writing, t being (1.6). This shows homogeneity between the two groups. That is to say, the two groups were almost at the same level of performance in the reflective writing skills. Thus, any variance between the two groups that might happen after the experiment could be attributed to the effect of the integrative strategy. The pre-test scores revealed that the participants had an average low proficiency in reflective writing skills.

VIII.   Results of the study:

Based on the statistical analysis of the present study, the following results could be stated:

1- There is a statistically significant difference among the means of scores of the control group and the experimental group in their performance in the post- reflective writing test, in favor of the experimental groups.

2- There is a statistically significant difference between the mean of scores of the experimental group in their performance in the pre and post administrations of the reflective writing test, in favor of the post administration.

3- The integrative strategybased on reflective thinking and Socratic Methodis effective in developing students' reflective writing skills.

IX.   The Conclusion:

Based on the results of the current study, the following could be concluded:

1-   The integrative strategy enhances some reflective writing skills, participants' ability togive opinions, provide   evidence to support these opinions, provide causes and effects, use a variety of writing strategies, use an organizing structure, show depth of reflection, summarize another person's ideas, Avoid run-on sentences, paraphrase another person's ideas and create unusual ideas to solve problem.

2-   The integrative strategy, it could be concluded that through practicing it, participants gained awareness into their reflective writing skills. They are being allowed to practice their skills, monitor their thoughts, improve their communication skills and evaluate their performance.

3-   Teaching reflective writing technique fosters understanding the content of a text. The experimental group became more active in learning it. They showed their contribution in the discussion and participated well in the teaching and learning process by giving some opinions and asking some information they did not know. They enjoyed participating in the lesson.

4-   Giving students' positive feedback through the reflective writing process by the teacher improved their reflective writing tasks.

5-   Integrative strategy helped secondary school students be good reflective writers.

6-   Working in groups in some sessions is an opportunity to encourage weak students to participate positively in different activities. Also, the maps are sometimes designed collaboratively in class and therefore, enhance the sense of cooperation of learners.

7-   Reflective writing is seen as a vital aspect to motivate students as writers to internalize the understandings that are arrived at through dialogues as well as to encourage them to apply their new ways of thinking to their lives. One way that this can happen is through the use of reflective essays. In this perspective, it can be understood that students' writings are developed from their reflections. In this study reflective writing is used as a vehicle for internalization.

8-   Integrative strategy used to facilitate the educational material and help create a positive learning experience.

9-   Using integrative strategy made students more excited about the educational material and helped them carry out their writing tasks with more enthusiasm and responsibility.

10-   Creating a good social climate and a relaxed learning environment encourages students to learn easily.

11-   Teacher's role is to be a guide, monitor, reader, facilitator and organizer.

12-   Student's role is to be active, enthusiastic and enhancing self-efficacy and self-confidence.

13-   There is a positive attitude towards using the integrative strategy based on reflective thinking and Socratic Method, as they motivated students and made them interested in learning.

X.   Suggestions for further research:

In the light of the study findings and results, the following are suggested for further research:

1- Further research would be needed to examine the relation of the integrative strategy to other language skills such as reading, listening and speaking.

2- More researches are needed to provide effective strategies for developing reflective writing.

3- Replicating the experimental treatment with a larger number of participants from a more representative sector of population to identify accurately writing skills to help curriculum designers integrate the appropriate texts in their textbook.

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